



# COUNCIL WORK SESSION

Wednesday, April 01, 2026

## APPROVED MINUTES

### MEMBERS PRESENT

Mayor Jennifer Massey  
Council President Jessica Chilton  
Councilor Mark Gundersen  
Councilor Russell Hubbard  
Councilor Brandon Sundeen

### STAFF PRESENT

John Walsh, City Administrator	Gloria Butsch, Finance Director (via Zoom)
Kathy Payne, City Recorder	Shanna Duggan, Recreation Manager
Lisa Scholl, Deputy City Recorder	Jacob Graichen, City Planner
Matthew Smith, Police Chief	Mike De Roia, Building Official
Doug Treat, Police Lieutenant	Tyler Hills, Water Treatment Operator & AFSCME President
Suzanne Bishop, Library Director	AFMSCME Union Members
Mouhamad Zaher, Public Works Director	Ashley Wigod, Contracted City Attorney (via Zoom)

### OTHERS

Steve Topaz	Matt Kenaga	Brady Preheim
Lynne Pettit	Steve Toschi	Robyn Toschi
Grant Toschi	Jay Echternach	Scobby
April Biracree		

### CALL WORK SESSION TO ORDER – 3:00 p.m.

### DECLARATION OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Contracted City Attorney Wigod explained the requirements for declaring conflicts of interest, including the provisions of Senate Bill 983 adopted in 2025 by the Oregon Legislature that permits local public officials to participate in discussions and vote on city budgets even if the budget includes compensation for themselves or a relative, provided they announce that actual conflict of interest first.

Mayor Massey declared an actual conflict of interest under ORS 244.120 as amended by Senate Bill 983, noting that her spouse is employed by the City as a police officer. She stated that because the budget includes compensation and benefits for city positions, she may participate in discussion and vote on the adoption of the local budget after making this disclosure.

### CLEARING CONFUSION AND SETTING THE FACTS STRAIGHT

#### 1. Responses to March 18, 2026 Visitor Comments

Mayor Massey addressed two items to clarify inaccuracies from previous public comments. First, regarding text message records between former Chief Greenway and officers, she clarified that former Officer Cutright, not Officer Gaston, made the critical statements mentioned by a citizen during visitor comments. Officer Cutright no longer works for the City.

Second, she addressed questions about who the city attorney represents, clarifying that the city attorney represents the City as a municipal corporation and reports directly to the City Council. The attorney provides legal services for elected officials, city administration, and staff in their official capacity, but does not represent any individual elected official, employee, or members of the public.

Chief Smith provided additional clarifications regarding comparisons made to the Scappoose Police Department. He verified that Scappoose does not have 24-hour coverage and noted the significant disparity in call volumes. St. Helens responded to 17,306 calls for service in 2025 compared to Scappoose's 7,481. He provided detailed statistics showing St. Helens' much higher response numbers for disturbances, overdoses, sexual assaults, and welfare checks.

Lieutenant Treat clarified confusion about employee work hours, explaining that apparent discrepancies in overtime records result from different payment categories being combined, such as FTO pay percentages, holiday pay, and overtime rates appearing together in the system.

**VISITOR COMMENTS** - *Limited to three (3) minutes per speaker*

- ◆ Tyler Hills, representing AFSCME Local 1789, strongly objected to proposed furloughs that could amount to a 20% reduction in pay. He argued this would create significant hardship for employees and drastically reduce services including parks, library, recreation, and municipal court functions. Hills noted that the Police Department accounts for approximately 49% of the General Fund but would contribute only about 10% of furlough savings. He suggested cost-saving measures including returning police to a 5-8 schedule instead of 4-10, reducing 24-hour coverage, and cutting Council meetings to once monthly.
- ◆ Robyn Toschi advocated for keeping library services, staff, and hours unchanged, emphasizing that libraries are essential public institutions that bridge the digital divide. She criticized the disproportionate growth of police spending relative to other City services.
- ◆ Steve Topaz explained the roles and responsibilities of City Council, emphasizing that Council is responsible for everything regardless of who implements decisions, and that communication between the mayor and administrator is the legal connection between council and city administration.
- ◆ Grant Toschi, citing his 35+ years of financial analysis experience, presented detailed analysis of police overtime spending. He noted the department is 96% through its full-year overtime allocation and on pace to overspend by \$268,000 for the year, contributing nearly two-thirds of the estimated General Fund deficit. He recommended immediately stopping all police overtime since no approved overtime remains for the fiscal year.
- ◆ Steve Toschi called for Council to take control of city governance and address spending issues. He provided detailed overtime analysis showing 6,332 hours of documented overtime primarily for shift coverage (1,624 hours), extended shift coverage (934 hours), and holiday pay (880 hours). He emphasized that overtime is largely due to scheduling issues rather than investigative work and called for enforcement of the 8-hour shifts specified in the collective bargaining agreement.
- ◆ Brady Preheim agreed that employees should not bear the burden of budget balancing due to lack of Council action. He suggested eliminating Council stipends entirely and canceling Community Day to save costs. He also questioned what laws police officers are allowed to violate without consequences.

- ◆ Matt Kenaga raised concerns about illegal fireworks enforcement, noting that this year's semi quincennial anniversary and Saturday July 4th could lead to exceptional fireworks activity. He requested the City announce that decades-old fireworks laws will be enforced this year.
- ◆ Steve Topaz returned for a second comment, reflecting on recent editorial cartoons depicting the mayor addressing various City problems alone, noting that these issues predated her election and calling for cooler heads and people to do their jobs properly.

Mayor Massey clarified misinformation regarding previous public comments and asked if any Council members had responses. Mayor Massey noted that Community Day funding comes from the tourism account and not the General Fund, and thus would not affect the current fiscal issues. Discussions turned towards clarifying the impact of 911 service fees and the City's structural budget issues.

Chief Smith and Lieutenant Treat addressed concerns about police overtime and emphasized the importance of officer safety and public safety, defending the need for flexibility with shifts due to emergency calls and court appearances. He noted the current lack of 24-hour coverage and explained the interim reliance on the Columbia County Sheriff's Office, which commenced providing overnight coverage as of the previous night. The arrangement is set to continue until August when the Department can resume full coverage upon completing the field training for newly hired officers. Chief Smith mentioned ongoing evaluations with the sheriff's office to improve cooperation and ensure adequate coverage for the city.

Council members discussed the impact of scheduling on staffing, the reliance on the Sheriff's Office, and the overall challenges the Police Department faces in hiring new officers.

## **DISCUSSION TOPICS**

### **2. Quarterly Reports from City Departments/Divisions - Building and Planning Divisions**

Building Official De Roia and City Planner Graichen reported on division activities without specific concerns raised by Council members.

### **3. Review of Proposed Changes in Building Department Fees - *Building Official Mike De Roia***

Building Official De Roia explained that building fees are generally increasing by 3%, with some fees adjusted higher to better reflect actual time, labor, and materials costs. Councilor Hubbard asked if increases were across the board, and De Roia confirmed the general 3% increase with some specific fees adjusted beyond that amount.

De Roia noted that the last significant fee increase was in 2017, making this a nine-year gap. The purpose is to reduce the burden on the General Fund, ensuring that development costs are borne by those who develop rather than general taxpayers.

### **4. Review Ordinance No. 3323 regarding Operational Regulations of the Planning Commission & Historic Landmarks Commission - *City Planning Jacob Graichen***

City Planner Graichen presented the ordinance revisions that had been discussed at the joint Planning Commission and City Council meeting. The changes modify absentee rules from three consecutive absences to four per calendar year before triggering a public hearing about Commission member continuance, along with other housekeeping items. Council had no questions or concerns.

## **5. Service Reduction Options Discussion - *City Administrator John Walsh***

City Administrator Walsh explained the need for budget balancing strategies to avoid a negative General Fund balance. He acknowledged that stopping non-essential expenditures and leaving positions open helps but isn't sufficient. The City initiated required 90-day bargaining negotiations regarding furloughs and potential layoffs.

Walsh outlined three options: furlough-first (maintaining services with 32-hour work week representing 20% pay reduction), reduction through layoffs following bargaining agreements, or program reductions. He acknowledged using the term "nonessential" was poor word choice and that all city services add value.

Mayor Massey emphasized this crisis developed over years through use of one-time revenues like property sales and timber cutting rather than sustainable funding. She noted that of the City's 16 funds, only the General Fund is unhealthy, and it has limited revenue sources.

Finance Director Butsch explained General Fund revenue sources including property taxes, franchise fees, and state shared revenues. She noted limitations on charging utility funds for General Fund services, particularly for police, library, recreation, and municipal court services which generate no offsetting revenue.

Walsh noted St. Helens is not alone in facing structural deficits where property tax revenue growth is capped while expenses grow faster. He confirmed the City has reduced from 85 to 73 staff members.

Council discussed stipend reductions, with general consensus to reduce Council stipends proportional to employee reductions. Mayor Massey noted she donates her full stipend to the Sarah Zuber memorial.

Chief Smith defended overtime practices, explaining that shift extensions usually result from critical calls requiring officers to remain beyond scheduled hours. He called suggestions to eliminate all overtime "patently ridiculous," using the example of officers investigating an attempted murder being required to leave mid-investigation when shifts end. He detailed the current transitional period where the department lacks 24-hour coverage, relying on Columbia County Sheriff's Office coverage, and explained staffing challenges in recruiting officers.

Council President Chilton inquired about response times and coverage arrangements with the sheriff's office. Chief Smith confirmed weekly meetings to evaluate the arrangement and discussed potential integration of detective divisions between agencies.

## **6. Discussion regarding Community Day in the Park Event - *City Administrator John Walsh***

City Administrator Walsh reported meeting with Treadway about budget and programs, noting that Community Day planning is about 80% complete with sponsors lined up and donated food arranged. The event is funded from tourism funds, not the General Fund.

Council President Chilton expressed concern about staff time involvement given potential furloughs. Councilor Sundeen suggested exploring options to consolidate Community Day with Fourth of July celebrations. Walsh noted the popular car show component and mentioned that Highway 30 Cruisers prefer not to bring cars out too early in summer due to weather concerns.

Mayor Massey asked Walsh to communicate with Treadway about possibilities for moving the event and potential cost savings, reporting back at the next Council meeting.

## **7. Request for breakdown of legal fees from the General Fund**

Contracted City Attorney Wigod outlined categories for organizing legal services costs including general municipal law, municipal court services, labor law, employment law, real estate transactions, land use

law and litigation, public records review and litigation, economic development and urban renewal, environmental issues, franchise matters, and contract disputes.

Council President Chilton expressed concern about paying attorney time to compile this breakdown. Finance Director Butsch explained the City already codes legal expenses to appropriate departments and can provide detailed reports by department without attorney involvement.

Mayor Massey decided to personally review the records and compile the breakdown rather than having the attorney perform the analysis, with Council support for this approach.

### **8. Update on nuisance fee ordinance in light of stabbing that occurred at Broadleaf**

Mayor Massey noted a draft ordinance exists and asked about June timeline feasibility. Contracted City Attorney Wigod indicated availability to work with the Police Department on the ordinance. Mayor Massey, Councilor Gundersen, and City Administrator Walsh agreed to work with Chief Smith on tightening up the ordinance before returning to the attorney for final legal review.

The discussion included mention of how the ordinance would help property managers be aware of habitual issues with tenants and assist in court proceedings. Fees would go into the General Fund, serving both as a management tool and revenue source.

### **9. Discussion regarding holding Council meetings once a month**

City Administrator Walsh and City Recorder Kathy Payne explained potential cost savings from reducing meeting frequency, including attorney costs, staff preparation time, and meeting production resources. Payne recommended the third Wednesday at 1:00 p.m. to accommodate longer agendas with consolidated monthly meetings.

Council President Chilton and Councilor Sundeen expressed inability to attend 1:00 p.m. meetings due to work schedules. After discussion, Council agreed to maintain 3:00 p.m. start time to ensure full Council participation.

Council explored separating executive sessions from regular meetings to reduce overall meeting length. Contracted City Attorney Wigod confirmed executive sessions can be scheduled separately and suggested providing some information through privileged memos rather than requiring executive session discussion.

The consensus emerged to begin once-monthly meetings in May on the third Wednesday at 3:00 p.m., with executive sessions scheduled separately as needed. An executive session was scheduled for the first Wednesday in May to provide transition briefing.

Councilor Sundeen requested exploring reducing board and commission meeting frequency as additional cost-saving measure, with plans to consult Parks and Trails Commission and Library Board about meeting every other month or quarterly.

### **10. Report from City Administrator John Walsh**

City Administrator Walsh provided a comprehensive written report covering multiple ongoing projects and initiatives. Key highlights included distribution of a General Fund educational flyer to all city addresses explaining how the General Fund works and what services it provides.

The State of the City meeting is scheduled for April 11 at 11:00 a.m. Walsh attended the final CET (Community Economic Development Team) dissolution meeting, with economic development programs transitioning to a partnership arrangement and potential rebranding as Columbia Business Alliance.

Public Works Office Assistant Sheri Ingram is retiring on June 1 after 28 years with the City.

Walsh is working on enterprise zone management transition following CET dissolution, retaining Art Fisher to handle the administrative duties for tax incentive programs.

Project updates included downtown concrete cap replacement by MEI, police station weekly coordination meetings with construction permits in process and June construction start planned, ongoing Romano waterfront development negotiations through May extension, transportation system plan kickoff for the state-funded \$300,000 project, and reservoir project advancement through Business Oregon's one-stop funding review process.

Additional projects mentioned included sewer capacity work, PGE substation progress, business park infrastructure opportunities including potential sewer line extensions to Kaster Road, dock rails bid acceptance at favorable pricing, Project Arcadia mill startup preparations, and ODOT community pathways project award for non-motorized trail connecting St. Helens to Scappoose.

Walsh noted continuing collaboration with Columbia County on economic development, Parks and Trails Commission master plan updates, working on the RFP for the water taxi, and submission for League of Oregon Cities governance excellence award for waterfront project community engagement efforts.

**ADJOURN – 5:19 p.m.**

**EXECUTIVE SESSION**

- ORS 192.660(2)(d) To conduct deliberations with persons appointed to carry out labor negotiations
- ORS 192.660(2)(e) To conduct deliberations with persons designated by the governing body to negotiate real property transactions
- ORS 192.660(2)(f) To consider information or records that are exempt by law from public inspection
- ORS 192.660(2)(h) To consult with legal counsel concerning the legal rights and duties of a public body with regard to current litigation or litigation likely to be filed

Respectfully transcribed by ClerkMinutes and submitted by Lisa Scholl, Deputy City Recorder.

ATTEST:

/s/ Kathy Payne  
Kathy Payne, City Recorder

/s/ Jennifer Massey  
Jennifer Massey, Mayor